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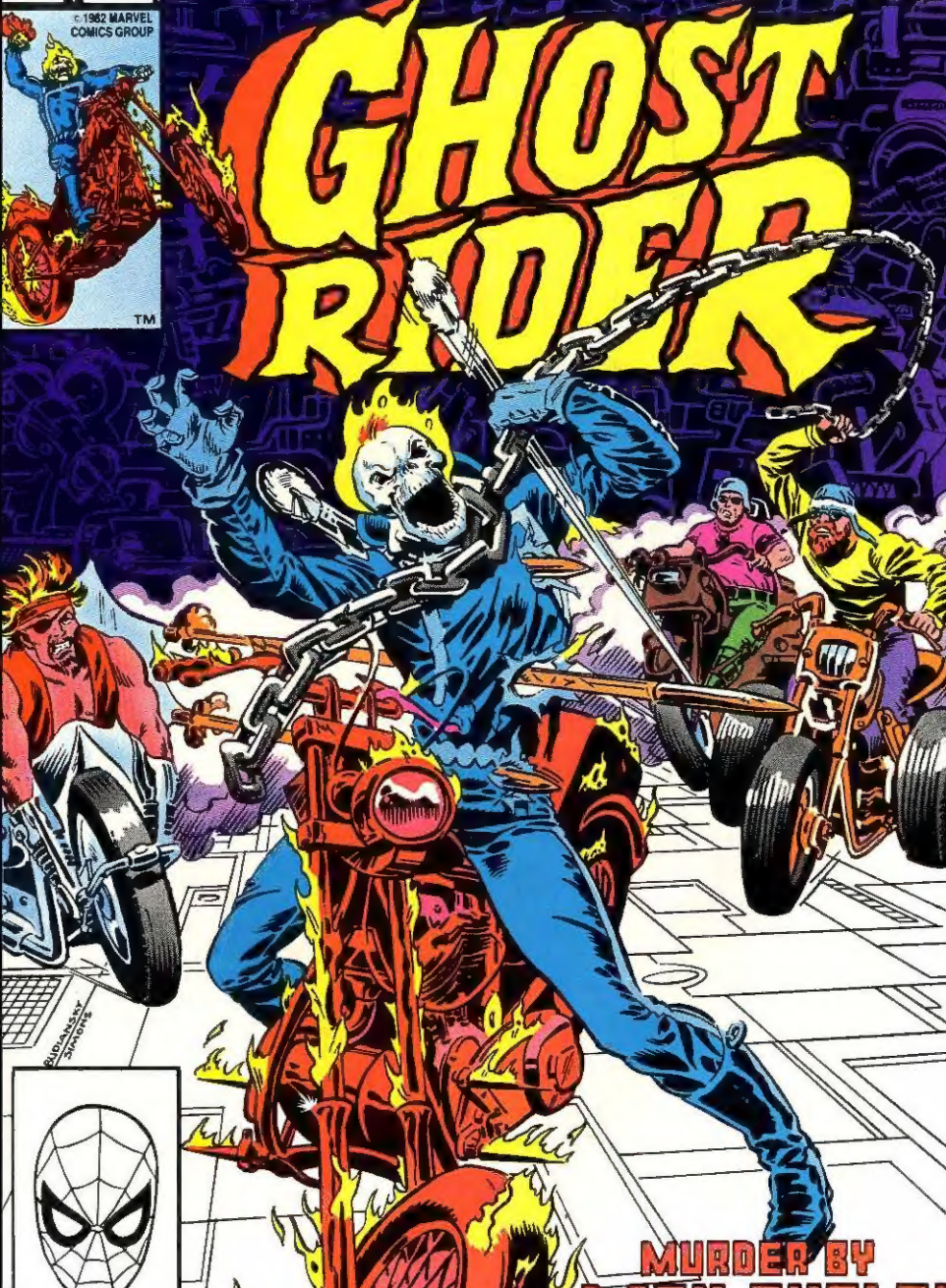

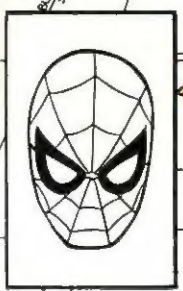

MURDER BY MAN-CYCLE!

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SCOTTIE in A Cracker Jack story
OKAY, SCOTTIE! THE SCORE IS TIED, BASES LOADED, AND TWO OUTS! GET IN THERE AND SHOW 'EM WHAT YOU'RE MADE OF.
I'LL DO MY BEST, COACH.
COACH
15
STRIKE ONE!
¡GULP! WHAT IF I STRIKE OUT?!??
STRIKE TWO!
YOU CAN DO IT, SCOTTIE!
YOU'RE A CRACKER JACK.
ZOOM!
WHAP!
WHEN YOU'RE REALLY GOOD-THEY CALL YOU CRACKER JACK
CRACK HOME RUN
YOU DID IT, SCOTTIE.
WE WON THE PLAYOFFS!
WHAT A CRACKER JACK!
Cracker Jack
CANDIED POPCORN AND PEANUTS
Toy Surprise INSIDE!
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Crunchy caramel-coated popcorn and peanuts and a secret toy surprise!

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Stan Lee PRESENTS: GHOST RIDER IN... SHADES OF GRAY!

BATHED IN MOONLIGHT, THE QUENTIN CARNIVAL SITS AS A JEWEL IN THE NIGHT... A WARM, INVITING SIGHT TO STUNT BIKER JOHNNY BLAZE AND HIS PASSENGER, THE MAGICIAN CALLED THE GREAT VINCENZO.
BUT THESE TWO HAVE NO TIME TO REJOICE AS THEY CAST NERVOUS GLANCES IN ALL DIRECTIONS, PEERING INTO THE SURROUNDING DARK, FOR THE TWISTED FACE OF A FREAKISH ENEMY.
NO, THIS NIGHT, THERE IS ONLY TIME--TO FEAR.

J. M. DeMATTEIS & BOB BUDIANSKY CO-PLOTTERS / SCRIPTER / PENCILER ★ KEVIN DZUBAN INKER ★ DIANA ALBERS LETTERER ★ BOB SHAREN COLORIST ★ TOM DeFALCO EDITOR ★ JIM SHOOTER CHIEF

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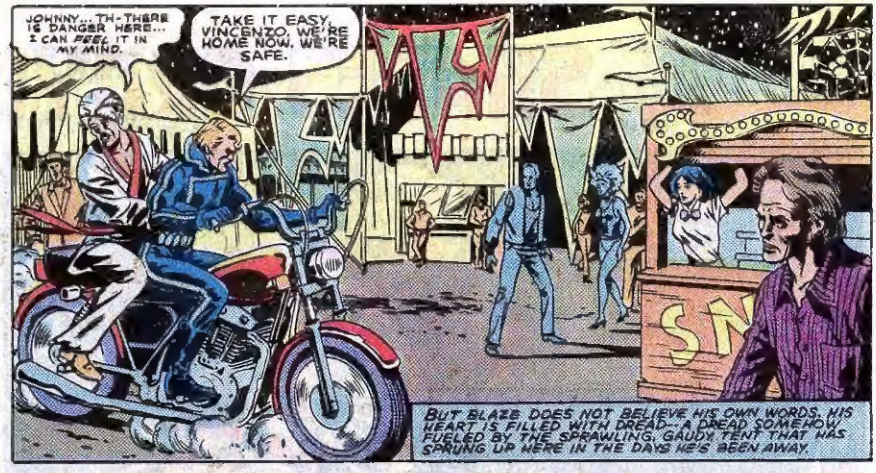
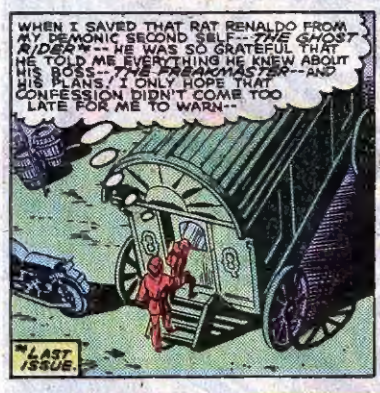
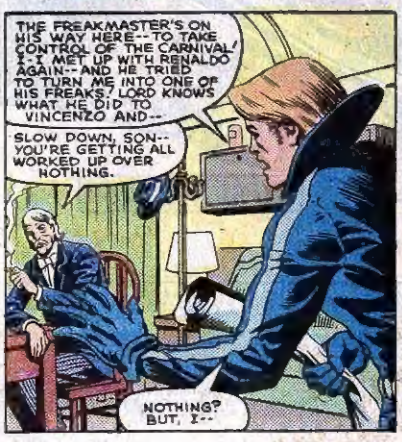

JOHNNY... TH-THERE IS DANGER HERE... I CAN FEEL IT IN MY MIND.
TAKE IT EASY, VINCENZO. WE'RE HOME NOW. WE'RE SAFE.
BUT BLAZE DOES NOT BELIEVE HIS OWN WORDS. HIS HEART IS FILLED WITH DREAD... A DREAD SOMEHOW FUELED BY THE SPRAWLING, GAUDY TENT THAT HAS SPRUNG UP HERE IN THE DAYS HE'S BEEN AWAY.


WHEN I SAVED THAT RAT RENALDO FROM MY DEMONIC SECOND SELF--THE GHOST RIDER--HE WAS SO GRATEFUL THAT HE TOLD ME EVERYTHING HE KNEW ABOUT HIS BOSS--THE FREAKMASTER--AND HIS PLANS. I ONLY HOPE THAT CONFESSION DIDN'T COME TOO LATE FOR ME TO WARN--
IN LAST ISSUE...

MISTER QUENTIN! MISTER QUENTIN, I'VE GOTTA TALK TO YOU!
OH... BLAZE. YOU'RE BACK. YOU LOOKED A MITE PEAKED WHEN YOU RAN OUT OF HERE THE OTHER NIGHT. HOW'RE YOU FEELING?
NEVER MIND THAT! WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING!
IN GR # 76.


THE FREAKMASTER'S ON HIS WAY HERE--TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE CARNIVAL! I-I MET UP WITH RENALDO AGAIN--AND HE TRIED TO TURN ME INTO ONE OF HIS FREAKS! LORD KNOWS WHAT HE DID TO VINCENZO AND--
SLOW DOWN, SON--YOU'RE GETTING ALL WORKED UP OVER NOTHING.
NOTHING? BUT, I--

SUDDENLY BLAZE SPINS, ALERTED BY THE SOUND OF SILK CURTAINS BEING DRAWN BACK...
OH, NO...
...STUNNED BY THE SIGHT OF TWO MONSTROUS FREAKS THAT LUMBER OUT OF THE SHADOWS, PREPARING THE WAY FOR THE ONE THEY SERVE...
2

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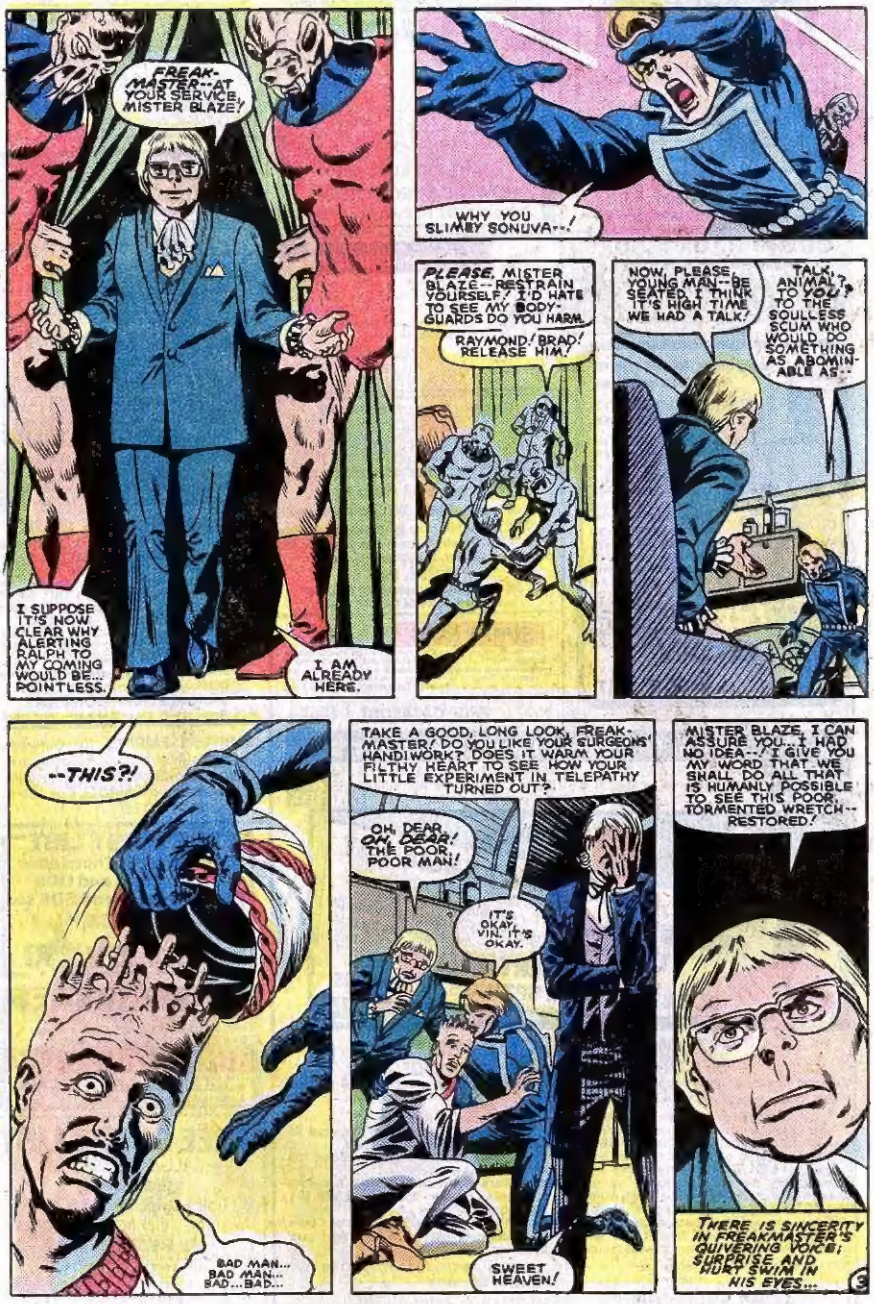
FREAK-MASTER--AT YOUR SERVICE, MISTER BLAZE!
I SUPPOSE IT'S NOW CLEAR WHY ALERTING RALPH TO MY COMING WOULD BE... POINTLESS.
I AM ALREADY HERE.
WHY YOU SLIMEY SONUVA--!
PLEASE, MISTER BLAZE--RESTRAIN YOURSELF! I'D HATE TO SEE MY BODY-GUARDS DO YOU HARM.
RAYMOND! BRAD! RELEASE HIM!
NOW, PLEASE, YOUNG MAN--BE SEATED. I THINK IT'S HIGH TIME WE HAD A TALK!
TALK, ANIMAL? TO YOU? TO THE SOULLESS SCUM WHO WOULD DO SOMETHING AS ABOMINABLE AS--
--THIS?!
BAD MAN... BAD MAN... BAD... BAD...
TAKE A GOOD, LONG LOOK, FREAK-MASTER! DO YOU LIKE YOUR SURGEONS' HANDIWORK? DOES IT WARM YOUR FILTHY HEART TO SEE HOW YOUR LITTLE EXPERIMENT IN TELEPATHY TURNED OUT?
OH, DEAR OH, DEAR! THE POOR, POOR MAN!
IT'S OKAY, VIN. IT'S OKAY.
SWEET HEAVEN!
MISTER BLAZE, I CAN ASSURE YOU... I HAD NO IDEA--I GIVE YOU MY WORD THAT WE SHALL DO ALL THAT IS HUMANLY POSSIBLE TO SEE THIS POOR, TORMENTED WRETCH--RESTORED!
THERE IS SINCERITY IN FREAKMASTER'S QUIVERING VOICE; SURPRISE AND HURT SWIM IN HIS EYES...

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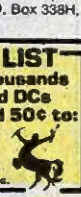

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...AND IT IS THIS REACTION WHICH SHAKES JOHNNY BLAZE, AND GIVES HIM PAUSE...
YOU ARE SURPRISED, MISTER BLAZE, THAT I AM NOT THE FROTHING MONSTER YOU EXPECTED TO FIND?
PERHAPS WHEN YOU'VE HEARD MY TALE, YOU WILL COME TO UNDERSTAND ME--
"--AND THE STRANDS OF FATE THAT HAVE DRAWN ME HERE!
"MY PARENTS WERE FREAKS! TWO GENTLE SOULS TRAPPED IN GROTESQUE BODIES!
FREAKS
"THE CARNIVAL PROVED THEIR ONLY VIABLE MEANS OF SURVIVAL.
"THE STINKING CARNIVAL--WHERE A SMALL BOY WATCHED HIS MOTHER AND FATHER EXHIBITED, MISTREATED, REVILED AND ABUSED!
"THAT ABUSE LED TO MY FATHER'S DEATH...
"...MY GRIEF-STRICKEN MOTHER FOLLOWING HIM BUT A MONTH AFTERWARDS.
"FROM THESE TRAGIC BEGINNINGS GREW THE GRAND OBSESSION OF MY LIFE: THE BUILDING OF A HAVEN FOR THE WORLD'S FREAKS.
MONKEY-TAILED BOY
USHER
$1°
"TO FINANCE THAT OBSESSION, I LAUNCHED WHAT PROVED TO BE THE FIRST OF AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF FREAK SHOWS.
"BUT MY FREAKS WERE TREATED WITH LOVE--AND RESPECT!
"WE WERE A FAMILY--WHOSE DREAMS OF A BETTER TOMORROW HELPED US SURVIVE THE DARKEST OF TODAYS.
"THOSE DREAMS CAME TRUE WHEN WE'D AMASSED ENOUGH OF A FORTUNE TO LEAVE MAN'S WORLD BEHIND--AND START ANEW ON OUR OWN PACIFIC ISLE.
"WE BUILT A UTOPIA--WHERE ONLY THOSE ON THE OUTSIDE WOULD BE VIEWED... AS FREAKS.
"EVER CONCERNED FOR OUR LESS FORTUNATE BROTHERS, WE CAREFULLY MONITORED THE WORLD BEYOND, AND, WHEN NECESSARY, SNATCHED AWAY OUR TORTURED KIN--LIKE YOUR OWN [illegible] AND BROUGHT THEM HERE TO PARADISE."
KIDNAPPED IN GR #70.
4

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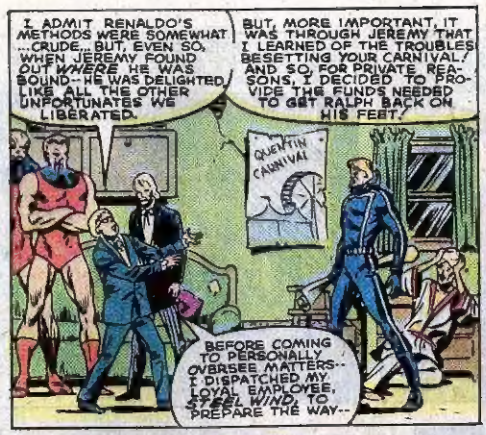
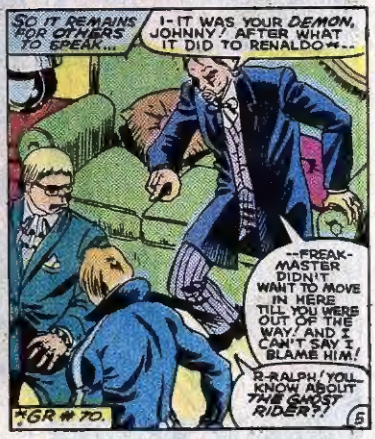

I ADMIT RENALDO'S METHODS WERE SOMEWHAT ...CRUDE... BUT, EVEN SO, WHEN JEREMY FOUND OUT *WHERE* HE WAS BOUND--HE WAS DELIGHTED, LIKE ALL THE OTHER UNFORTUNATES WE LIBERATED.
BUT, MORE IMPORTANT, IT WAS THROUGH JEREMY THAT I LEARNED OF THE TROUBLES BESETTING YOUR CARNIVAL! AND SO, FOR PRIVATE REASONS, I DECIDED TO PROVIDE THE FUNDS NEEDED TO GET RALPH BACK ON HIS FEET.
QUENTIN CARNIVAL
BEFORE COMING TO PERSONALLY OVERSEE MATTERS-- I DISPATCHED MY LOYAL EMPLOYEE, *STEEL WIND*, TO PREPARE THE WAY--

--LITTLE DREAMING THAT HER OWN MEGALOMANIA, COUPLED WITH THE SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS WHICH ONLY *HINDSIGHT* HAS NOW REVEALED, WOULD LEAD HER TO THE DISASTEROUS ACTIONS THAT NEARLY ENDED MY WORK BEFORE IT HAD BEGUN!
SHE WAS A HAPLESS, DEMENTED WOMAN--AND I DEEPLY REGRET THE DAMAGE SHE DID IN MY NAME!
*GR #75

BULL! IF YOU ARE SO INNOCENT, PAL--HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED TO VINCENZO --AND WHAT *ALMOST* HAPPENED TO ME?
CHECK OUT THIS CHART, FREAKMASTER!

THAT'S WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND MAN HAD IN MIND FOR ME.-
AH... RENALDO! ANOTHER WHO VIOLATED MY TRUST--AND LET THE LUST FOR POWER BLIND HIM TO HIS HIGHER DUTIES!
I WILL NOT LIE TO YOU, MISTER BLAZE! I *DID* WANT YOU REPLACED...BUT I *NEVER*--WANTED ANY HARM TO COME TO YOU!


SO IT REMAINS FOR OTHERS TO SPEAK...
I--IT WAS YOUR *DEMON*, JOHNNY! AFTER WHAT IT DID TO RENALDO--
--FREAKMASTER DIDN'T WANT TO MOVE IN HERE TILL YOU WERE OUT OF THE WAY! AND I CAN'T SAY I BLAME HIM!
R-RALPH! YOU KNOW ABOUT *THE GHOST RIDER?!*
*GR # 70.
5

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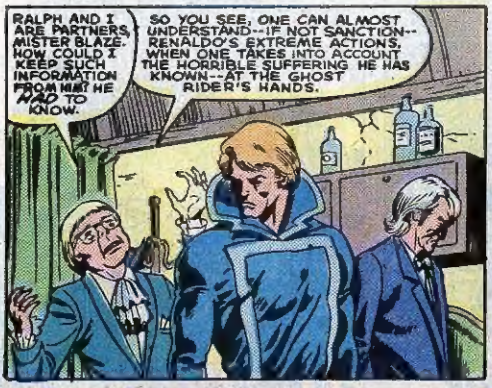
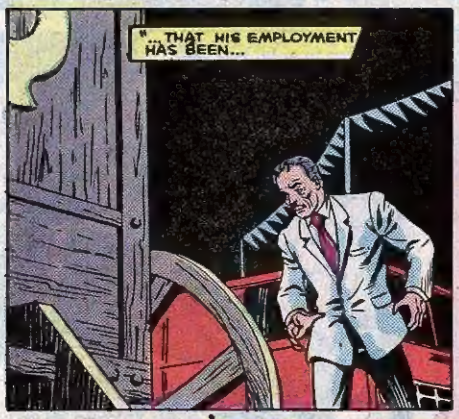
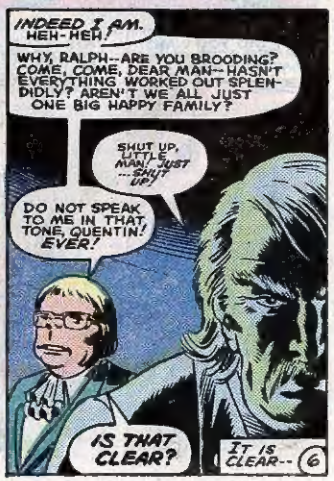

RALPH AND I ARE PARTNERS, MISTER BLAZE. HOW COULD I KEEP SUCH INFORMATION FROM HIM? HE HAD TO KNOW.
SO YOU SEE, ONE CAN ALMOST UNDERSTAND--IF NOT SANCTION--RENALDO'S EXTREME ACTIONS, WHEN ONE TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE HORRIBLE SUFFERING HE HAS KNOWN--AT THE GHOST RIDER'S HANDS.

"STILL, YOU NEED NOT WORRY OVERMUCH ABOUT RENALDO. ONCE HE HAS RETURNED HERE TONIGHT, I INTEND TO LET HIM KNOW, IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS...



BUT ENOUGH OF HIM--LET'S SPEAK OF US. HAVING MET YOU AT LAST-- I SEE WHAT AN IMPORTANT ASSET YOU ARE TO OUR CARNIVAL.
IF YOU CAN CONTROL THIS DEMON WITHIN YOU... WELL, THEN... I'D LIKE YOU TO STAY.


INDEED I AM. HEH-HEH.
WHY, RALPH--ARE YOU BROODING? COME, COME, DEAR MAN--HASN'T EVERYTHING WORKED OUT SPLENDIDLY? AREN'T WE ALL JUST ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY?
SHUT UP, LITTLE MAN! JUST ...SHUT UP!
DO NOT SPEAK TO ME IN THAT TONE, QUENTIN! EVER!
IS THAT CLEAR?
IT IS CLEAR--
6

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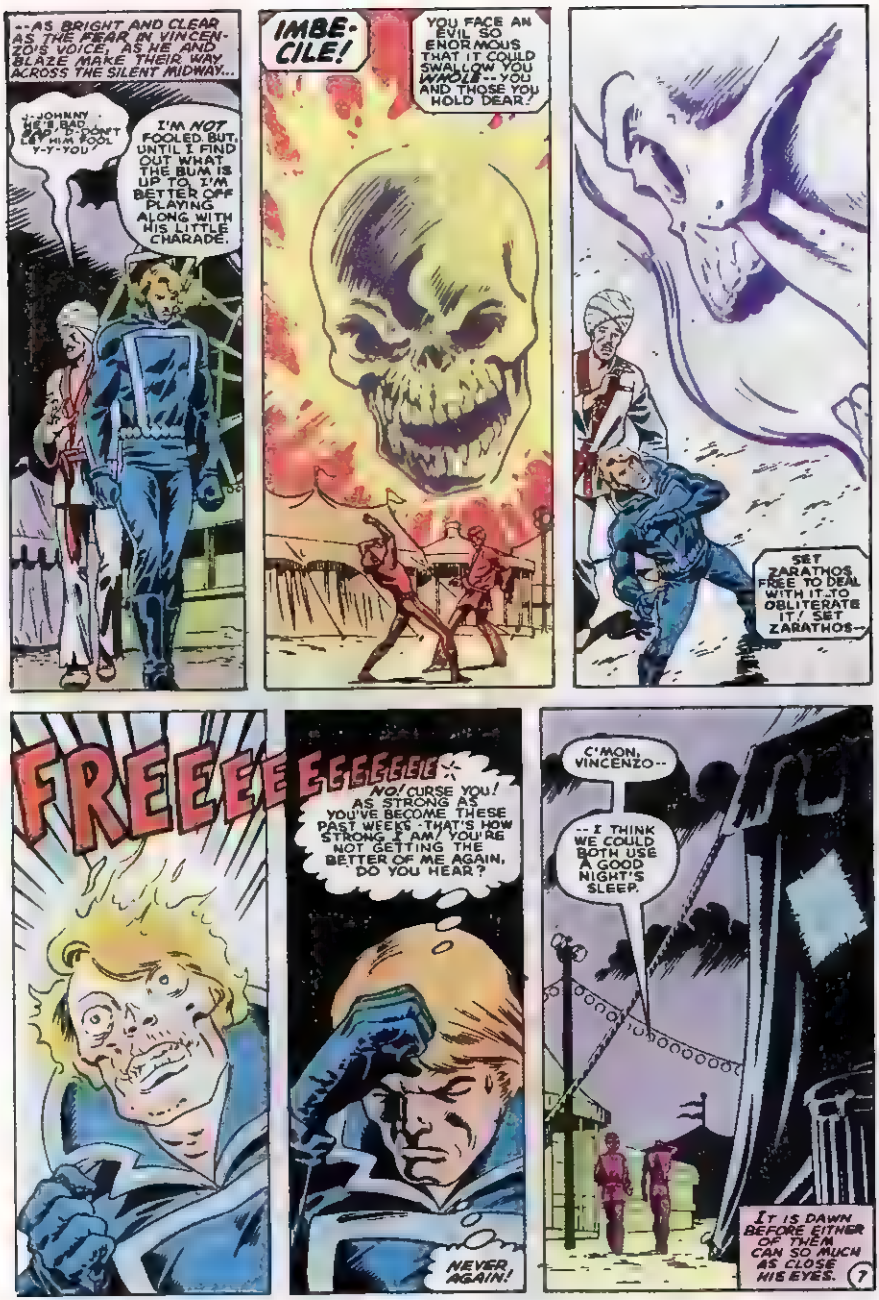
--AS BRIGHT AND CLEAR AS THE FEAR IN VINCENZO'S VOICE, AS HE AND BLAZE MAKE THEIR WAY ACROSS THE SILENT MIDWAY...
--JOHNNY -- HE'S BAD BAD--DON'T LET HIM FOOL Y-Y-YOU--
I'M NOT FOOLED BUT, UNTIL I FIND OUT WHAT THE BUM IS UP TO, I'M BETTER OFF PLAYING ALONG WITH HIS LITTLE CHARADE.
IMBE-CILE!
YOU FACE AN EVIL SO ENORMOUS THAT IT COULD SWALLOW YOU WHOLE--YOU AND THOSE YOU HOLD DEAR!
SET ZARATHOS FREE TO DEAL WITH IT--TO OBLITERATE IT! SET ZARATHOS--
FREEEEEEEEEEEE
NO! CURSE YOU! AS STRONG AS YOU'VE BECOME THESE PAST WEEKS -THAT'S HOW STRONG I AM! YOU'RE NOT GETTING THE BETTER OF ME AGAIN, DO YOU HEAR?
NEVER AGAIN!
C'MON, VINCENZO--
--I THINK WE COULD BOTH USE A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.
IT IS DAWN BEFORE EITHER OF THEM CAN SO MUCH AS CLOSE HIS EYES.
7

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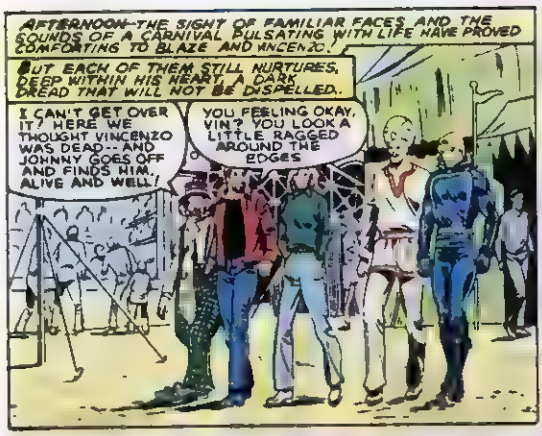
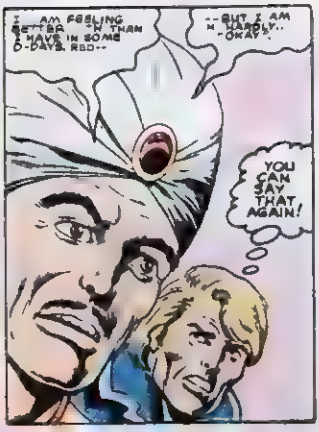
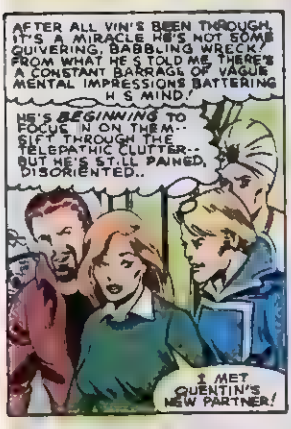
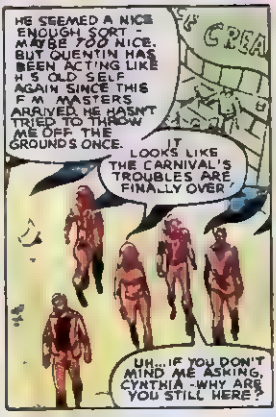
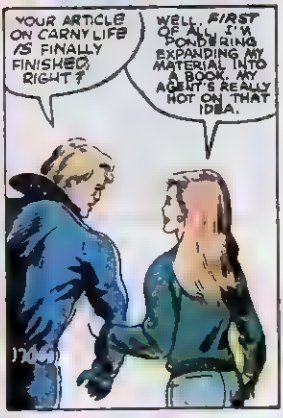
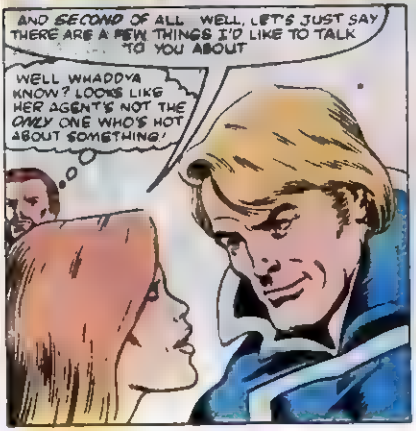

AFTERNOON--THE SIGHT OF FAMILIAR FACES AND THE SOUNDS OF A CARNIVAL PULSATING WITH LIFE HAVE PROVED COMFORTING TO BLAZE AND VINCENZO.
BUT EACH OF THEM STILL NURTURES, DEEP WITHIN HIS HEART, A DARK DREAD THAT WILL NOT BE DISPELLED.
I CAN'T GET OVER IT! HERE WE THOUGHT VINCENZO WAS DEAD--AND JOHNNY GOES OFF AND FINDS HIM, ALIVE AND WELL!
YOU FEELING OKAY, VIN? YOU LOOK A LITTLE RAGGED AROUND THE EDGES

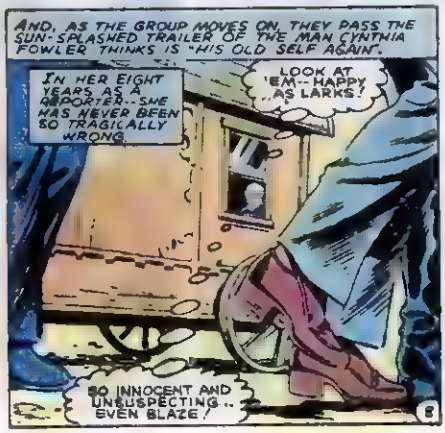



AFTER ALL VIN'S BEEN THROUGH, IT'S A MIRACLE HE'S NOT SOME QUIVERING, BABBLING WRECK! FROM WHAT HE'S TOLD ME, THERE'S A CONSTANT BARRAGE OF VAGUE MENTAL IMPRESSIONS BATTERING HIS MIND!
HE'S BEGINNING TO FOCUS IN ON THEM--SIFT THROUGH THE TELEPATHIC CLUTTER--BUT HE'S STILL PAINED, DISORIENTED..
I MET QUENTIN'S NEW PARTNER!


HE SEEMED A NICE ENOUGH SORT - MAYBE TOO NICE. BUT QUENTIN HAS BEEN ACTING LIKE HIS OLD SELF AGAIN SINCE THIS FM MASTERS ARRIVED. HE HASN'T TRIED TO THROW ME OFF THE GROUNDS ONCE.
IT LOOKS LIKE THE CARNIVAL'S TROUBLES ARE FINALLY OVER.
UH...IF YOU DON'T MIND ME ASKING, CYNTHIA -WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE?


YOUR ARTICLE ON CARNY LIFE IS FINALLY FINISHED, RIGHT?
WELL, FIRST OF ALL, I'M DOUBLING EXPANDING MY MATERIAL INTO A BOOK. MY AGENT'S REALLY HOT ON THAT IDEA.


AND SECOND OF ALL...WELL, LET'S JUST SAY THERE ARE A FEW THINGS I'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT
WELL WHADDYA KNOW? LOOKS LIKE HER AGENT'S NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO'S HOT ABOUT SOMETHING!


AND, AS THE GROUP MOVES ON, THEY PASS THE SUN-SPLASHED TRAILER OF THE MAN CYNTHIA FOWLER THINKS IS "HIS OLD SELF AGAIN".
IN HER EIGHT YEARS AS A REPORTER--SHE HAS NEVER BEEN SO TRAGICALLY WRONG.
LOOK AT 'EM--HAPPY AS LARKS!
SO INNOCENT AND UNSUSPECTING..EVEN BLAZE!
8

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WELL, IT'S ALL GONNA COME CRASHING DOWN ON THEM SOON ENOUGH! AND THERE'LL BE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT ME!
RALPH QUENTIN --YOU ARE ONE PITIFUL SHELL OF A MAN! CAN'T YOU EVEN WARN THEM? DO YOU HAVE TO STAND BACK AND LET IT ALL HAPPEN...?
YES, YOU DO YOU OLD FOOL AND YOU KNOW WHY! DON'T YOU?
DEEP IN RALPH QUENTIN'S SOUL, THERE IS A TINY SCREAM OF DEFEAT
WHILE OUTSIDE THERE IS A SOMEWHAT MORE STRIDENT SHRIEK
YAAAAAAA!!!
VINCENZO--?
IT IS ALL THE MAGICIAN CAN DO TO RAISE A TREMBLING ARM AND POINT AS HE THRASHES, GIBBERING, ON THE GROUND...
...FINALLY COLLAPSING INTO A WHIMPERING HEAP
YOU GUYS GET HIM BACK TO MY TENT THERE'S SOMETHING I HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF!
BUT, JOHNNY--
JUST DO IT, RED!
VINCENZO WAS POINTING TO THIS TENT - THE NEW ONE THAT FREAKMASTER PUT UP. THIS COULD BE A FALSE ALARM, BUT I'M BETTING THAT V.N'S MIND PICKED UP SOMETHING WEIRD FROM THIS PLACE -
--AND THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT WHAT!
MAYBE I SHOULD'VE TOLD RED WHAT'S GOING ON, AND LET HIM COME WITH ME--
--BUT CONSIDERING THE POTENTIAL DANGERS I THINK IT'S BETTER THAT I INVESTIGATE FREAKMASTER ALONE!
WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?
INSIDE!
NO ONE GOES IN--I'M THOR! THE BOSS'S PERMISSION
BUT HE HAS MY PERMISSION, RAYMOND!
COME IN MISTER BLAZE WE'VE NOTHING TO HIDE HERE!
9

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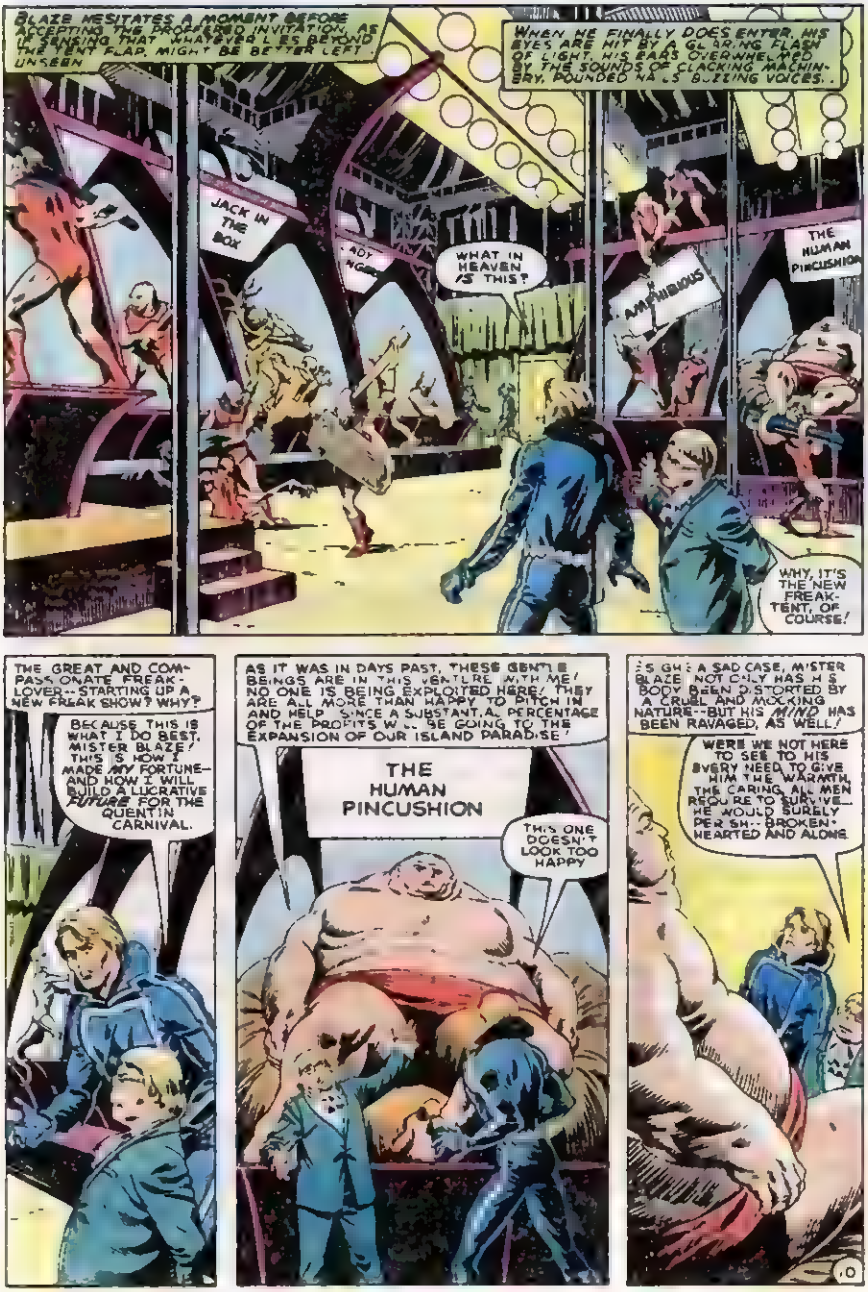
BLAZE HESITATES A MOMENT BEFORE ACCEPTING THE PROFFERED INVITATION, UNKNOWING THAT WHATEVER LIES BEYOND THE TENT FLAP, MIGHT BE BETTER LEFT UNSEEN
WHEN HE FINALLY DOES ENTER, HIS EYES ARE HIT BY A GLARING FLASH OF LIGHT, HIS EARS OVERWHELMED BY THE SOUNDS OF CLACKING MACHINERY, POUNDED WITH BUZZING VOICES..
JACK IN THE BOX
LADY
WHAT IN HEAVEN IS THIS?
AMBIDEXTROUS
THE HUMAN PINCUSHION
WHY, IT'S THE NEW FREAK-TENT, OF COURSE!
THE GREAT AND COMPASSIONATE FREAK-LOVER--STARTING UP A NEW FREAK SHOW? WHY?
BECAUSE THIS IS WHAT I DO BEST, MISTER BLAZE! THIS IS HOW I MADE MY FORTUNE--AND NOW I WILL BUILD A LUCRATIVE FUTURE FOR THE QUENTIN CARNIVAL.
AS IT WAS IN DAYS PAST, THESE GENTLE BEINGS ARE IN THIS VENTURE WITH ME! NO ONE IS BEING EXPLOITED HERE! THEY ARE ALL MORE THAN HAPPY TO PITCH IN AND HELP SINCE A SUBSTANTIAL PERCENTAGE OF THE PROFITS WILL BE GOING TO THE EXPANSION OF OUR ISLAND PARADISE!
THE HUMAN PINCUSHION
THIS ONE DOESN'T LOOK TOO HAPPY
IS SHE A SAD CASE, MISTER BLAZE! NOT ONLY HAS HER BODY BEEN DISTORTED BY A CRUEL AND MOCKING NATURE--BUT HIS MIND HAS BEEN RAVAGED, AS WELL!
WERE WE NOT HERE TO SEE TO HIS EVERY NEED, TO GIVE HIM THE WARMTH, THE CARING, ALL MEN REQUIRE TO SURVIVE... HE WOULD SURELY PERISH--BROKEN-HEARTED AND ALONE.

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FOR AN INSTANT, BLAZE AND THE MISSHAPEN BRUTE LOCK EYES.. AND THE EMPTINESS, THE HORROR, BLAZE SEES REFLECTED IN THOSE UNBLINKING ORBS IS DIZZYING
HE FIGHTS DOWN A SUDDEN SURGE OF NAUSEA
..AND THEN, SUDDENLY..
J-JOHNNY IT'S RENALDO!
RENALDO!!
RENALDO--?
THE WORD IS A BARELY AUDIBLE WHISPER..
"..BUT IT IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TO START THE HUMAN PINCUSHION THRASHING AND BELLOWING
UH... NOTHING
WHAT DID YOU SAY TO HIM, MISTER BLAZE? WHAT DID YOU SAY?
OH, IT WAS CERTAINLY SOMETHING/ SOMETHING THAT HAS CLEARLY TERRIFIED THE POOR MAN.
I AM AFRAID, MISTER BLAZE, THAT I MUST ASK YOU TO LEAVE. YOUR PRESENCE HERE IS PROVING MOST UNSETTLING
WHATEVER YOU SAY YOU RE THE BOSS.
NOT THAT WAY, MISTER BLAZE!
THE WAY YOU CAME!
LIKE I SAID, FREAK-MASTER YOU RE THE BOSS!
11

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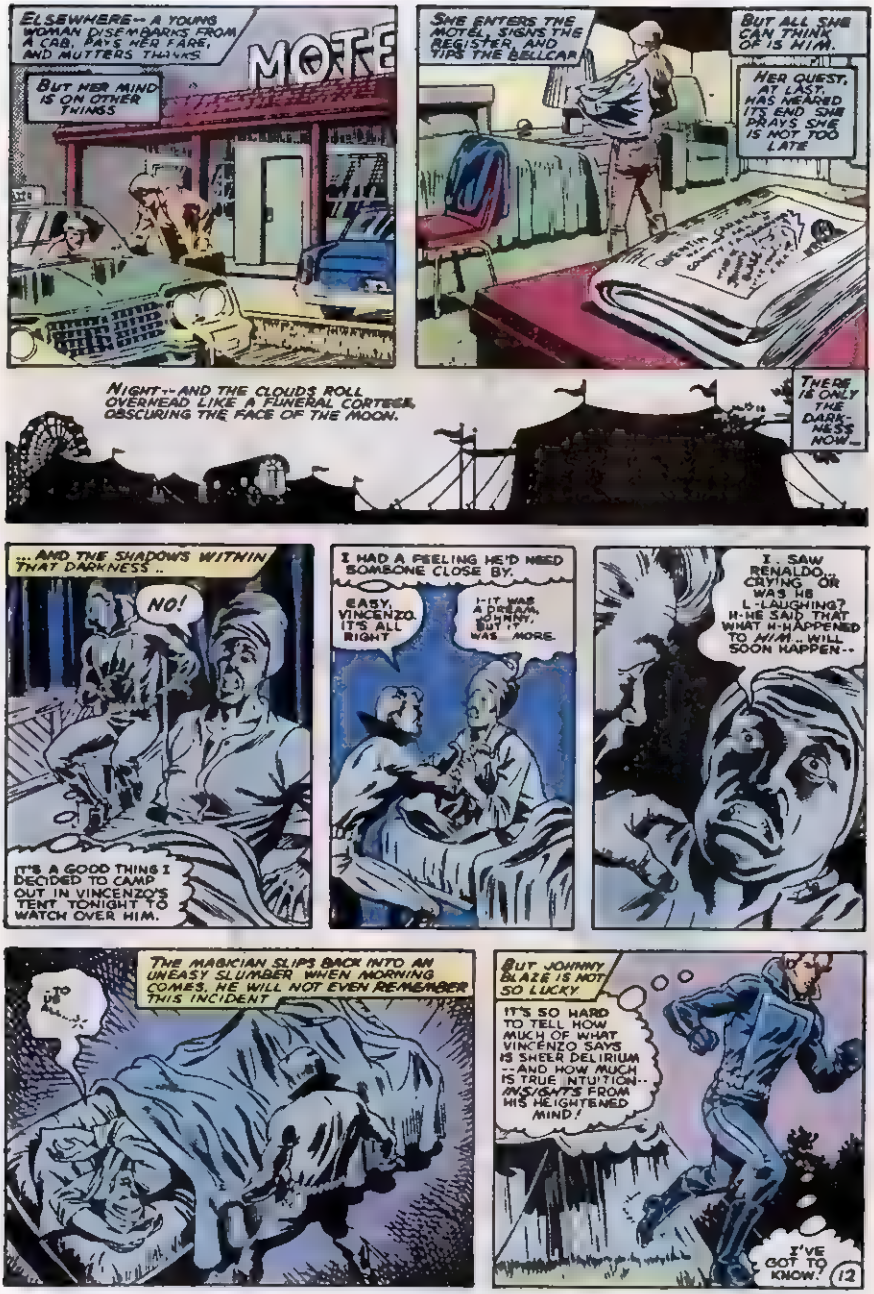
ELSEWHERE-- A YOUNG WOMAN DISEMBARKS FROM A CAB, PAYS HER FARE, AND MUTTERS THANKS
MOTEL
BUT HER MIND IS ON OTHER THINGS
SHE ENTERS THE MOTEL, SIGNS THE REGISTER, AND TIPS THE BELLCAP
BUT ALL SHE CAN THINK OF IS HIM.
HER QUEST, AT LAST, HAS NEARED ITS END. SHE PRAYS SHE IS NOT TOO LATE
NIGHT-- AND THE CLOUDS ROLL OVERHEAD LIKE A FUNERAL CORTEGE, OBSCURING THE FACE OF THE MOON.
THERE IS ONLY THE DARKNESS NOW--
...AND THE SHADOWS WITHIN THAT DARKNESS..
NO!
IT'S A GOOD THING I DECIDED TO CAMP OUT IN VINCENZO'S TENT TONIGHT TO WATCH OVER HIM.
I HAD A FEELING HE'D NEED SOMEONE CLOSE BY.
EASY, VINCENZO. IT'S ALL RIGHT
I-IT WAS A DREAM, JIMMY, BUT IT WAS MORE.
I SAW RENALDO... CRYING OR WAS HE L-LAUGHING? H-HE SAID THAT WHAT H-HAPPENED TO HIM.. WILL SOON HAPPEN--
...TO BE...
THE MAGICIAN SLIPS BACK INTO AN UNEASY SLUMBER WHEN MORNING COMES, HE WILL NOT EVEN REMEMBER THIS INCIDENT
BUT JOHNNY BLAZE IS NOT SO LUCKY
IT'S SO HARD TO TELL HOW MUCH OF WHAT VINCENZO SAYS IS SHEER DELIRIUM --AND HOW MUCH IS TRUE INTUITION-- INSIGHTS FROM HIS HEIGHTENED MIND!
I'VE GOT TO KNOW!
12

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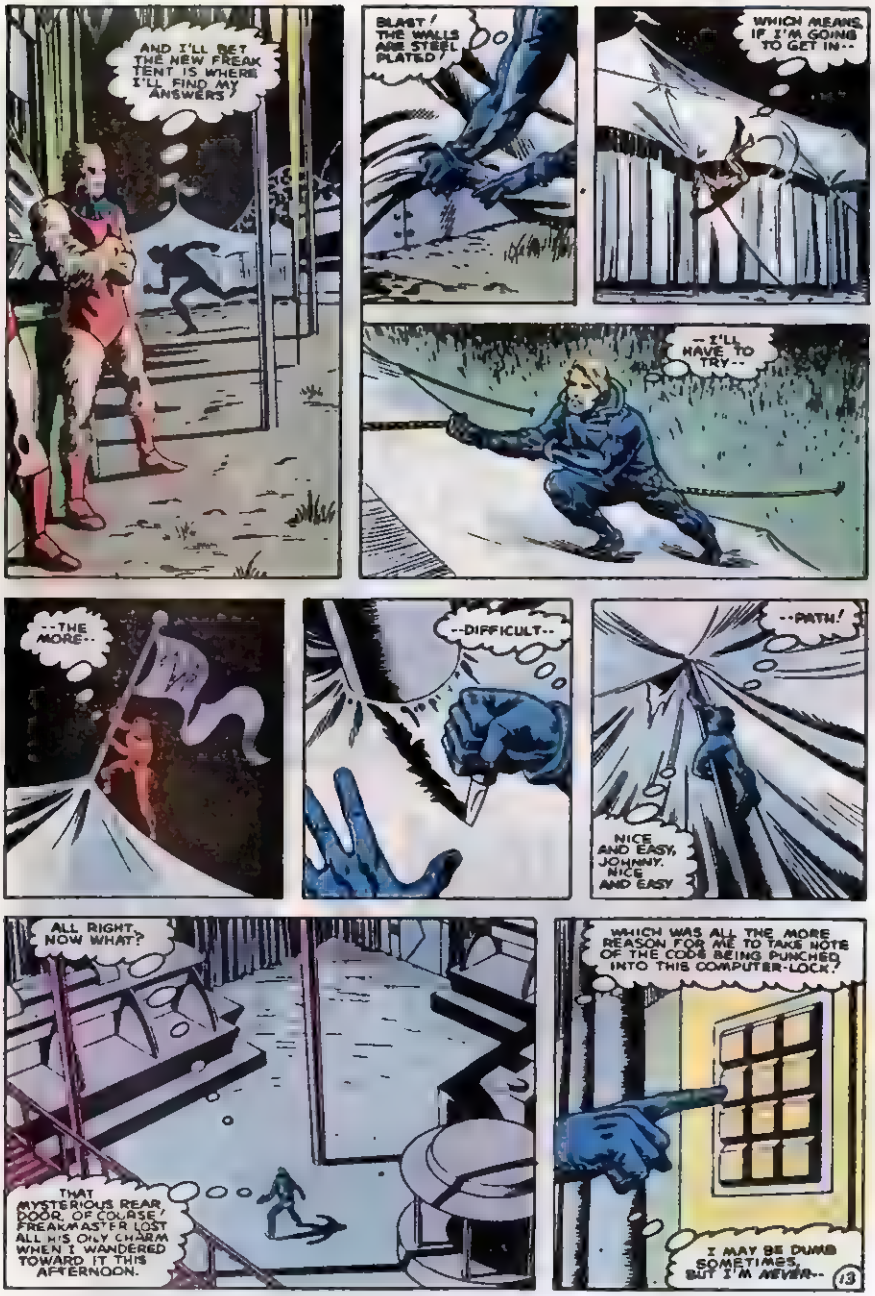
AND I'LL BET THE NEW FREAK TENT IS WHERE I'LL FIND MY ANSWERS!
BLAST! THE WALLS ARE STEEL PLATED!
WHICH MEANS, IF I'M GOING TO GET IN--
--I'LL HAVE TO TRY--
--THE MORE--
--DIFFICULT--
--PATH!
NICE AND EASY, JOHNNY. NICE AND EASY
ALL RIGHT. NOW WHAT?
THAT MYSTERIOUS REAR DOOR, OF COURSE! FREAKMASTER LOST ALL HIS ONLY CHARM WHEN I WANDERED TOWARD IT THIS AFTERNOON.
WHICH WAS ALL THE MORE REASON FOR ME TO TAKE NOTE OF THE CODE BEING PUNCHED INTO THIS COMPUTER-LOCK!
I MAY BE DUMB SOMETIMES, BUT I'M NEVER--
13

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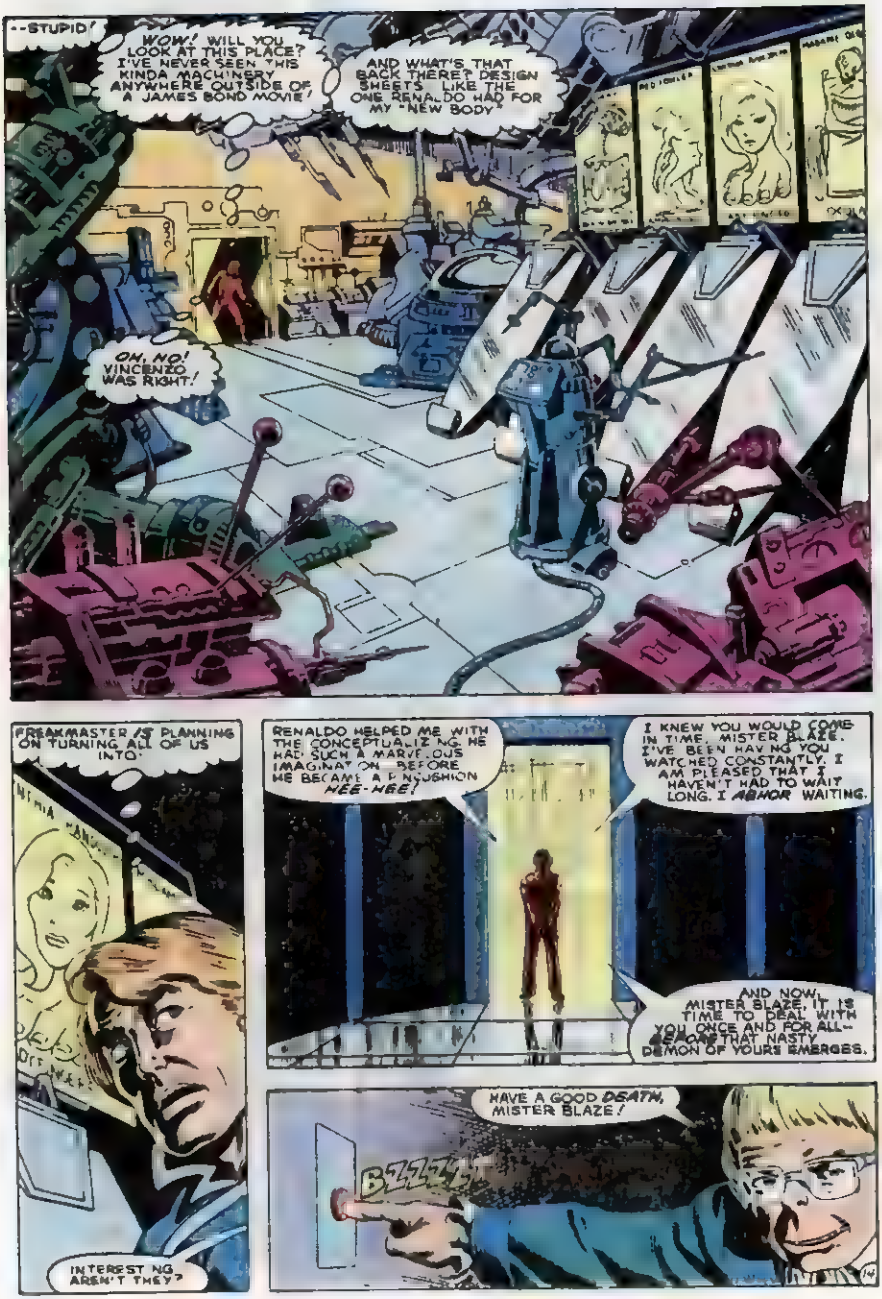
--STUPID!
WOW! WILL YOU LOOK AT THIS PLACE? I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS KINDA MACHINERY ANYWHERE OUTSIDE OF A JAMES BOND MOVIE!
AND WHAT'S THAT BACK THERE? DESIGN SHEETS LIKE THE ONE RENALDO HAD FOR MY "NEW BODY"?
OH, NO! VINCENZO WAS RIGHT!
FREAKMASTER IS PLANNING ON TURNING ALL OF US INTO--
INTERESTING, AREN'T THEY?
RENALDO HELPED ME WITH THE CONCEPTUALIZING. HE HAD SUCH A MARVELOUS IMAGINATION BEFORE HE BECAME A PINCUSHION
HEE-HEE!
I KNEW YOU WOULD COME IN TIME, MISTER BLAZE. I'VE BEEN HAVING YOU WATCHED CONSTANTLY. I AM PLEASED THAT I HAVEN'T HAD TO WAIT LONG. I ABHOR WAITING.
AND NOW, MISTER BLAZE, IT IS TIME TO DEAL WITH YOU ONCE AND FOR ALL-- AS SOON AS THAT NASTY DEMON OF YOURS EMERGES.
HAVE A GOOD DEATH, MISTER BLAZE!
BZZZZT

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SHORUMMM
TERRIFIC
THOSE THINGS ARE HALF-MOTOR-CYCLE HALF-MAN! JUST LIKE WHAT FREAKMASTER AND RENALDO HAD PLANNED FOR ME! BUT THESE ARE BIGGER... HEAVIER.
...DEADLIER!!
LEAPED OUT OF THE WAY, JUST IN TIME! BUT, HOW LONG CAN I KEEP THIS UP?
JOHNNY... JOHNNY! TO THERE IS DANGER, JOHNNY!
BLAZE! LET ME OUT, IDIOT!
LET ME OUT!!
BOTH OF YOU, STOP IT! GET OUT OF MY MIND!

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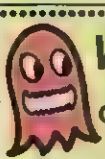

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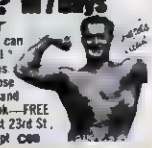

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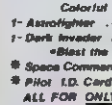

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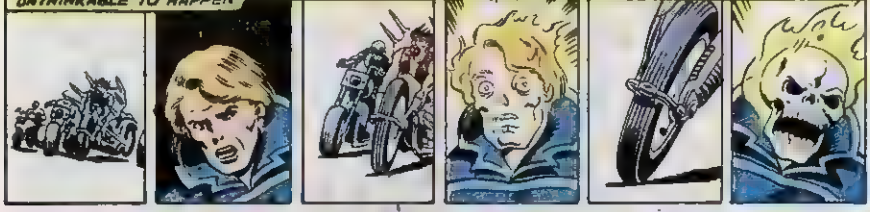
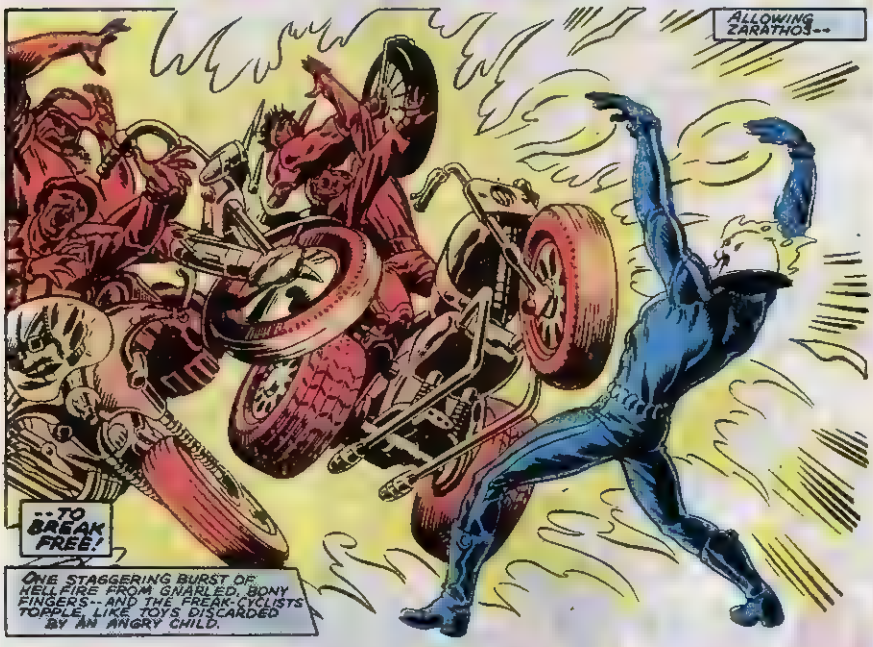
TWIN FORCES TEAR AT BLAZE FROM WITHIN, VINCENZO'S CONCERN, AND GHOST RIDER'S RAGE-- RIPPING THROUGH HIS PSYCHE, SHATTERING DOWN HIS WALLS OF SELF-CONTROL, ALLOWING THE UNTHINKABLE TO HAPPEN.





ONE STAGGERING BURST OF HELLFIRE FROM GNARLED, BONY FINGERS-- AND THE FREAK-CYCLISTS TOPPLE, LIKE TOYS DISCARDED BY AN ANGRY CHILD.

THERE IS FATE-- WEAVING HER TANGLED SKEIN...
WHERE THE DEVIL IS THAT SCREAMING COMING FROM?
OH, LORD-- THE LIGHTS'RE ON OVER AT THE FREAK TENT! BUT HE SWORE TO ME THAT HE WOULDN'T START YET!
16

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SO--YOU HAVE TASTED MY HELL-FIRE YET STILL HAVE THE COURAGE TO ATTACK ANEW! SPLENDID! I HAVE KNOWN MUCH FRUSTRATION OF LATE! I HAVE HAD MY PAST REVEALED TO ME AND MY FUTURE DENIED ME!
MY RAGE IS BOUNDLESS--AND MUST HAVE EXPRESSION!
AND I SEE NO BETTER WAY THEN TO LEAP UPON MY MYSTIC FLAME CYCLE--
--AND RAIN DESTRUCTION UPON YOU ALL!
YAAAAAAA
AH...YOUR SCREAMS SUCCOR ME! YOUR TORMENT IS SUSTENANCE TO MY HUNGRY--
--SOUL YAKKKK!
MISCREANT! DO YOU THINK I AM SOME HAPLESS PUDDET TO BE DRAGGED ABOUT ON A STRING?
ANSWER ME, CURSE YOU!?
17

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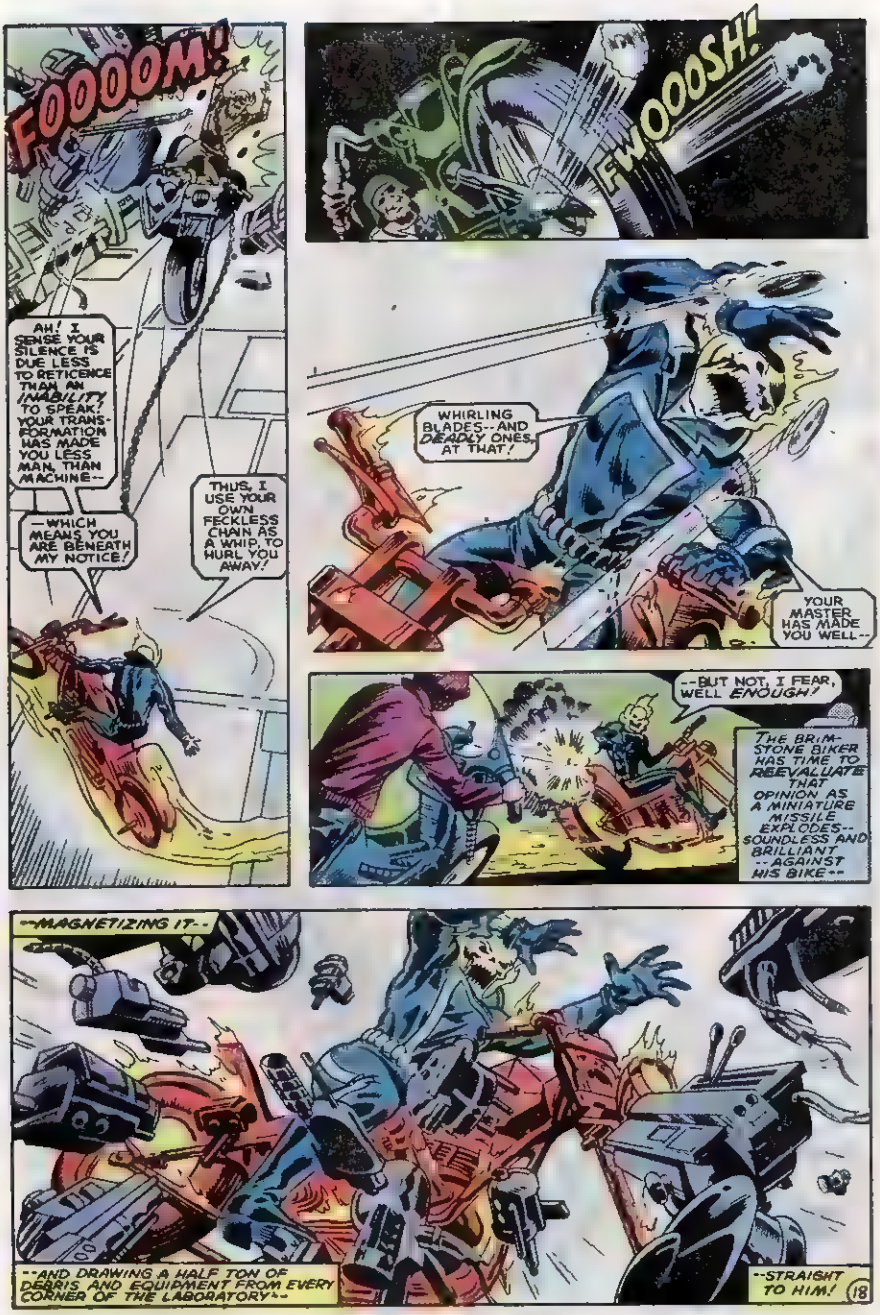
FOOOOM!
AH! I SENSE YOUR SILENCE IS DUE LESS TO RETICENCE THAN AN *INABILITY* TO SPEAK! YOUR TRANSFORMATION HAS MADE YOU LESS MAN, THAN MACHINE--
--WHICH MEANS YOU ARE BENEATH MY NOTICE!
THUS, I USE YOUR OWN FECKLESS CHAIN AS A WHIP, TO HURL YOU AWAY!
FWOOOSH!
WHIRLING BLADES--AND *DEADLY* ONES, AT THAT!
YOUR MASTER HAS MADE YOU WELL--
--BUT NOT, I FEAR, WELL *ENOUGH!*
THE BRIMSTONE BIKER HAS TIME TO *REEVALUATE* THAT OPINION AS A MINIATURE MISSILE EXPLODES--SOUNDLESS AND BRILLIANT --AGAINST HIS BIKE--
--MAGNETIZING IT--
--AND DRAWING A HALF TON OF DEBRIS AND EQUIPMENT FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE LABORATORY--
--STRAIGHT TO HIM!
18

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ZARATHOS STAGGERS FORTH FROM THE WREAKAGE, EACH LEADEN STEP REFLECTING AN INCREDIBLE PAIN, ONLY EQUALLED BY THE DEMON'S DETERMINATION NOT TO FALL!
OH, MY GOD!
SHOOOSH!
BUT DETERMINATION IS NOT ENOUGH TO PROTECT HIM FROM ADAMANTIUM-TIPPED SPIKES THAT IMPALE HIM UPON A GLEAMING OPERATING TABLE...
... WHERE HE HANGS, CRUCIFIED, BEFORE HIS ENEMIES
RRRIP!
OR IS IT?
MORTAL SCUM! ZARATHOS WILL NEVER FALL BEFORE THE LIKES OF YOU!
NEVER!
NEVER!!
RIPPED FROM ITS MOORINGS, THE 500 POUND TABLE BECOMES A BIZZARE BATTERING RAM WITH WHICH THE GHOST RIDER MERCILESSLY POUNDS HIS FOES, AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN!
AND THIS TIME, WHEN THEY FALL...
19

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...THEY DO NOT RISE AGAIN
IT IS A SIGHT THAT IMPRINTS ITSELF UPON RALPH QUENTIN -- A TATTOO OF THE MIND THAT CAN NEVER BE REMOVED.
IT IS TIME, FREAKMASTER - THE GAME-PLAYING S DONE! PUNISHMENT MUST BE METED OUT!
THE GUILTY MUST PAY!
THE G-GUILTY--?
I--IF IT'S THE GUILTY YOU WANT, DEMON-- TH-THEN TAKE HIM!
TAKE HIM!
TELL HIM QUENTIN! FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE--ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRUTH--
--OR DO YOU WANT MY DEATH ON YOUR CONSCIENCE, TOO?
HE'S RIGHT, DEMON
I'M THE ONE WHO SHOULD BE PUNISHED
YOU ASK FOR PUNISHMENT? I FIND THIS MOST INTRIGUING, OLD MAN
SPEAK.
YEARS AGO--SO MANY YEARS THAT IT'S EASY TO PRETEND IT NEVER HAPPENED. I WAS LIKE A LOT OF YOUNG BUCKS SCRAMBLING UP, RAT-LIKE, FROM POVERTY. HUNGRY SCARED. THERE WASN'T A THING I WOULDN'T DO TO SURVIVE
FOR FIVE YEARS I SLAVED TO SCRAPE UP THE MONEY TO BUY MY FIRST LITTLE CARNIVAL--AND I KNEW THAT, IF IT WENT DOWN, MY LIFE WENT WITH IT. SO I WAS HARD. ON MYSELF. MY WORKERS. AND ESPECIALLY... ON MY FREAKS.
IT WAS ME WHO ABUSED FREAKMASTER'S PARENTS -- ME WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS FATHER DYING, ALONE AND HUNGRY, IN A CAGE. IT'S A GUILT I BURIED IN A GRAVE. A GUILT FREAKMASTER DUG UP-- AND FORCED ME TO FACE.
AND THAT'S WHY I COULDN'T STAND AGAINST HIM WHEN HE MOVED IN ON ME.
THAT'S WHY I'M GOING TO SUFFER LIKE HE SUFFERED-- WHEN HE WAS A BOY
20

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GHOST WRITERS!

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
387 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016

TOM DeFALCO
EDITOR
LINDA GRANT
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Tom:

I've just finished reading GHOST RIDER #75 and I just had to write to tell you how great it was. DeMatteis's script deserves a standing ovation. He made me feel pity for Eliot, hatred for Steel Wind, and hope for Johnny Blaze. The ending nearly blew me out of my seat. I just can't wait for the next issue

Kenneth Kamwi
138-20 31st RD
Flushing, NY 11354

You'll just have to suffer like the rest of us, Kenneth!

Dear Tom,

Excellent! Excellent!

I loved the Steel Wind story in GHOST RIDER #75. . . and, even better, you finally remembered Johnny's Blaze's first and longest girlfriend . . . Roxanne! What's in store for her? I can't wait to find out!

One last question . . . how "savagely brutal" can a comic book get with a Comics Code Authority seal on it?

Philippe R. Dejean, Esq
1796 Grand Concourse
Bronx, NY 1057

We'll explore that limit together, Phillippe!

Dear Tom and Ghost Rider Crew:

Why did Ghost Rider destroy Steel Wind? She would have made a good enemy for some other hero. I think vegetablizing her was a bad idea

Paul Clayton
PO Box 186
Commerce City, CO 80037

Who said she was a vegetable? Paul, you should know by now that the Ghost Rider's hellfire affects everyone differently. We'll just have to wait until Steel Wind's next appearance before we start casting aspersions.

Dear Marvel:

GHOST RIDER 74 and 75 prove that GR has evolved into an excellent comic Budiansky's art has been excellent. DeMatteis matches the quality of the panels by creating gripping suspense.

GR has become an excellent escape into supernatural suspense. You people amaze me. Keep it up

Larry Morgan
Dix, Il 62830

We'll try, Larry.

Dear Tom,

I knew that J.M. DeMatteis wouldn't let me down! When I heard he was going to take over as permanent scripter of GHOST RIDER, I immediately had hopes of seeing this book rise back to it's rightful spot at the top (just like he did with THE DEFENDERS.) While two issues aren't enough to pass final judgment on an entire series, J.M. certainly gives an old fan like me something to look forward to

While last issue was somewhat disappointing, it did show tremendous potential This issue (#75), however, was THE BEST GHOST RIDER story I've read since #19 (my personal GR favorite). By the way, the mysterious young woman on page 4 is Roxanne Simpson, right?

Tom Stanley
3950 Galley Road #8-A
Colo. Springs, Colo. 80909

Right—as this very issue clearly proves!

Dear Tom:

STEEL WIND deserved what she got!

Mike Walker
6850 SW 180th
Aloha, Oregon 97007

Did she?

Dear Ghost-hosts,

GHOST RIDER #75 was superbly done. The writing was very good, & the art was excellent. GHOST RIDER is a title that is constantly being upgraded

The introduction of the demon's apparitional appearances to Johnny Blaze is an interesting twist. As I see it, it indicates that Blaze is losing control over the Brimstone Biker. If this keeps up, GR may be suppressing Johnny instead of visa versa.

Crawford Smith
128 Summit Drive
York, PA 17403

Hmmm . . . Sounds interesting!

Dear Tom,

I have never had a cover leap out from the stands and assault me like the one on GHOST RIDER #75 with Steel Wind! Let's see more of her. With the right encouragement, she has the potential to be an interesting heroine!

The main reason I bought this issue of Ghost Rider was the art. I don't usually care for this title, but that may change if I see more of Steel Wind! Please keep us informed as to what you have planned for her

Jo Nichols
2491 McGregor Drive
Penticton, B.C. V2A6J5
CANADA

Be assured that we will, Jo.

Dear Tom,

I quote from GHOST RIDER #75, "Had I not risen from his psyche's depths, Blaze would have surely met his end today and I would have been consigned to eternal limbo!" (Zarathos speaking). In this speech, the Demon has perhaps given Johnny Blaze a powerful weapon to use to control him. The Demon needs Johnny. If Blaze is smart enough to understand The Demon, and tough enough to deal with him, he just may convince his other self to modify his behavior so that they might both survive and advance. I think that it is about time Johnny learned to control his demon. The Ghost Rider could emerge as comicdom's most interesting anti-hero since the Sub-Mariner But without this unnatural alliance, GR is no hero at all. There are many other possible directions for Johnny Blaze and the Demon. I'm not sure which one they will take

Wallace Lee Hopkins
Box 428
Glen Carbon, Il. 62034

Neither are we, Wallace.

Tom DeFalco

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BULLPEN BULLETINS...

I'M BACK!

I hope you enjoyed last month's guest column by David Michelinie, who happens to be the brilliant, superstar scripter of *The Further Adventures of Indiana Jones*, among other things. And, in case you've forgotten me, I am Jim Shooter, Editor in Chief of Marvel Comics. That means I'm the *boss* here, folks! Neat, huh?

REQUEST OF THE MONTH

Ever since I mentioned *Shooter's Law of Mail* in one of my columns, I've been asked again and again if I've established any *other* "laws" governing Marvel Comics, and, if so, what are they. Okay. You asked for it, you *got* it. Here are some of...

SHOOTER'S LAWS

The First Law of Fair Play

No one works for free. Anyone who does any work assigned by a Marvel Editor will be fairly paid. No exceptions.

The Second Law of Fair Play

A creator's time is valuable. If we waste any of it, we pay fairly for it.

The Third Law of Fair Play

All creative people will be treated equally and fairly. There will be no caste system – no elite with special privileges and unfair advantages over other creators. Every person has equal rights. Editors will make creative judgements based upon a creators' work, not upon his name, or reputation. No one "deserves" special rights or privileges. Any special treatment granted to one creator is a slab in the back to all others.

The First Law of Mail

All mail *must* be opened and read by the person to whom it is addressed. No exceptions.

The Second Law of Mail

Mail from readers and fans should be treated with interest and respect. Those letters are from the people we work for. They're our bosses.

The Law of Dealing With Readers and Fans In Person

This should be done as often as possible, at conventions, comics stores, and anywhere else. Again, we work for these people, and they should be treated accordingly.

The Law of the Creation of Comics

There are *no rules* governing or limiting creativity. There is nothing which *must* be done and nothing which *cannot* be done. All things are possible. If something works, it works. If it doesn't work, never say it can't. There *is* a way. Try everything.

That's a few of them. There are others, of course. Maybe someday I'll list some more.

WORD HAS REACHED ME...

... that in a poll of British fans conducted by *Worlds Collide*, a classy British fan magazine, Marvel titles, series, and creators won *every single category* for which they were eligible. As you might expect, *Daredevil* and *The X-Men* were the big vote-getters. Thanks, Britain!

THAT'S IT...

...for now. Next month, be sure to tune in for a special feature – the first (and quite possibly the last!) *interview* to be published in this column. I'm going to be asking probing questions of the man who has more copies of his work in print that any other human being in the history of the world. That's right, the most widely published creator (of *anything*) in history – and, no, folks, it isn't Stan Lee. Not even close.

Till then,

Jim Shooter

THE MIGHTY MARVEL CHECKLIST

- ☐ **MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #98** — The Thing, and Fremdin Richards.
- ☐ **TEAM AMERICA #11**
- ☐ **KA-ZAR #25**
- ☐ **NEW MUTANTS #2**
- ☐ **DAREDEVIL #193**
- ☐ **DARK CRYSTAL #1**
- ☐ **SPIDER-WOMAN #40**
- ☐ **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #230**
- ☐ **CAPTAIN AMERICA #280**
- ☐ **THOR #330** (See Hype Box)
- ☐ **GHOST RIDER #79**
- ☐ **MOON KNIGHT #30**
- ☐ **INDIANA JONES #4**
- ☐ **DOCTOR STRANGE #[illegible]**
- ☐ **INCREDIBLE HULK #[illegible]**
- ☐ **AVENGERS #230**
- ☐ **CONAN #145**
- ☐ **MARVEL TALES #190** - Special double-sized reprinting Amazing Spider-Man Annual #1 by STAN LEE and STEVE DITKO.
- ☐ **X-MEN # 168**
- ☐ **ROM #41**
- ☐ **POWER MAN/IRON FIST #92**
- ☐ **G.I. JOE #10**
- ☐ **FANTASTIC FOUR #253**
- ☐ **MARVEL TEAM-UP #128** — Spider-Man and Captain America.
- ☐ **IRON MAN #169**
- ☐ **PETER PARKER #77**
- ☐ **DEFENDERS #118**
- ☐ **STAR WARS #70**
- ☐ **MASTER OF KUNG FU #123**
- ☐ **THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE #4**
- ☐ **WHAT IF #38** — *"What If the Marvel Super Heroes Faced Old Age,"* featuring Daredevil, Captain America, the Vision and the Scarlet Witch.

MARVEL MAGAZINES

- ☐ **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #65**
- ☐ **MARVEL AGE #1**
- ☐ **BLiP #1** (See Hype Box)

MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVELS

- ☐ **#5: THE X-MEN** — by CHRIS CLAREMONT, BRENT ANDERSON and STEVE OLIFF. "God Loves, Man Kills."

SPECIAL EVENTS

- ☐ **WARLOCK #5** — The representation of JIM STARLIN'S classic saga continues.
- ☐ **OBNOXIO THE X-MEN #1** — *Crazy's Magazine's* notorious clown takes on the uncanny mutants in a tale unlike anything you might be expecting.

THE HYPE BOX

THOR #330 — A new era begins for the thunder god as the creative team of ALAN ZELENETZ and BOB HALL — who brought last summer's THOR ANNUAL so dramatically to life — combine once again (joined by veteran inking ace VINCE COLLETTA) to chronicle the adventures of Odin's favorite son. For starters, they've got Goldilocks up against the Crusader, whose mission is to wipe out all Pagans — including Norse deities! It's a stunner — and it's only the beginning.

BLiP #1 — "BLiP"? What's a "BLiP"? Why, merely Marvel's fantastic foray into some wild and exciting new territory! We think it's gonna be the most fun-packed and fact-packed Video Games magazine around — and with features like *Video Games of the Stars*, *Blip Tips on Strategy*, a six page Donkey Kong comic by STEVEN GRANT and BOB CAMP and a couple of captivating contests offering great prizes — we're betting you'll agree. Look for it.

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EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED --IS ON MY HEAD. SO IF YOU'RE TAKING ANYONE, DEMON... TAKE ME.
FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HIS ENTRAPMENT WITHIN THE BODY OF JOHNNY BLAZE, THE GHOST RIDER TASTES UNCERTAINTY.
HE CARES LITTLE FOR EITHER OF THESE MEN-- AND WOULD LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN TO LET HIS HELLFIRE SEAR BOTH THEIR SOULS
BUT, WHILE ON EARTH, HE IS COMPELLED BY BLAZE'S SUBCONSCIOUS TO PUNISH THE GUILTY--A COMPULSION HE HAS FOUGHT, TIME AND AGAIN, WITHOUT COMPLETE SUCCESS
SO HE PAUSES, WEIGHING TWO LIVES SO HE PAUSES, KNOWING DOUBT.
AND IN THAT PAUSE, HIS GRIP ON THIS WORLD SLIPS, JUST ENOUGH...
NO!
...FOR THE MAN WITHIN THE MONSTER TO CLAW HIS WAY UPWARD THROUGH CAVERNS OF MIND...
NOOOOOOO
...FOR JOHNNY BLAZE TO REEMERGE!
F-FREAKMASTER-- YOU'VE SEEN FOR YOURSELF HOW WILD... HOW UNCONTROLLABLE THE GHOST RIDER IS.
TAKE YOUR PEOPLE AND GET THE DEVIL OUT OF HERE-- BECAUSE, NEXT TIME, I PROMISE YOU--
--I WON'T STOP HIM.
NO, MISTER BLAZE--I DON'T BELIEVE YOU WILL. SO I WILL PACK UP MY TENTS--AND STEAL AWAY INTO THE NIGHT
BUT DON'T THINK YOU'VE WON ANYTHING. YOU HAVEN'T.
TAKE A LOOK AT THIS PALE-FACED OLD FOOL, MISTER BLAZE. STUDY THE DEFEAT IN HIS EYES, THE AGONY ETCHED INTO HIS FACE--AND UNDERSTAND--
--THAT YOUR DEMON AND I HAVE, TOGETHER, SHARED A VICTORY--
--FOR RALPH QUENTIN IS BROKEN... AND WILL NEVER AGAIN KNOW PEACE.
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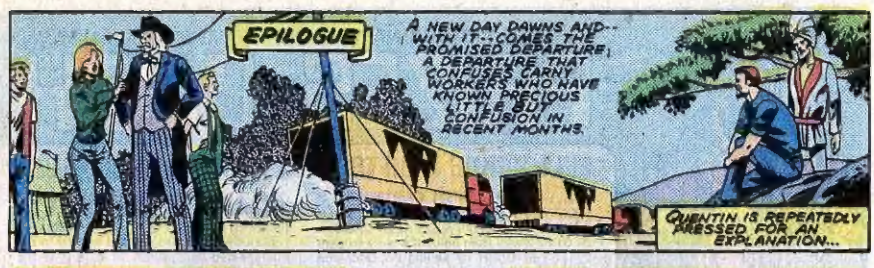
EPILOGUE
A NEW DAY DAWNS AND--WITH IT--COMES THE PROMISED DEPARTURE, A DEPARTURE THAT CONFUSES CARNY WORKERS WHO HAVE KNOWN PRECIOUS LITTLE BUT CONFUSION IN RECENT MONTHS.
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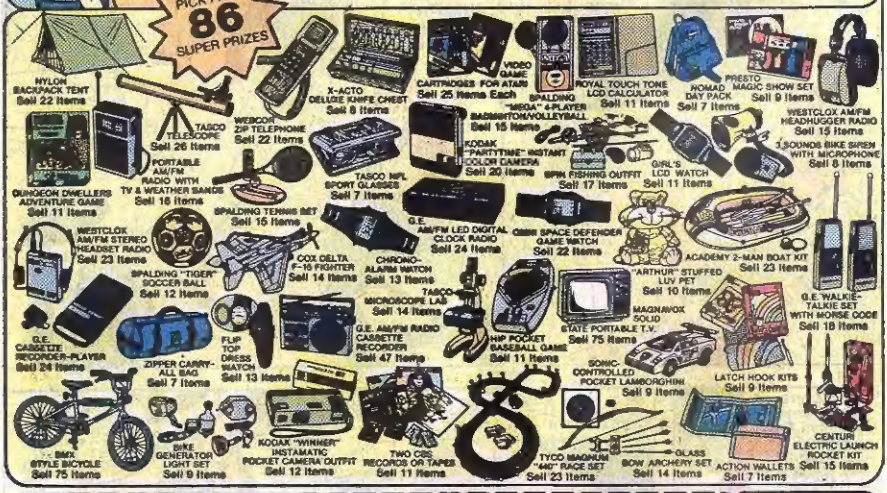
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COMING SOON!

Reactor

IT'S ONE HOME VIDEO GAME YOU CAN REALLY GET INTO.

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